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9/11: A Clearer Understanding
by Senator Craig

America has always been good at battling “isms.” In World War II, we recognized that Nazism and Japanese imperialism were antithetical to freedom and American democracy. So we resolved to fight it, and we defeated it.

When the Cold War descended upon the globe, Americans recognized that communism also was a threat, not just to the United States, but to all freedom-loving nations. So we resolved to fight it, committing to a battle that we knew could take years, even decades. We may have wavered at times, but in the long run, we stayed committed. After more than 40 years of struggle, the Berlin Wall fell, and three years later, the Soviet Union ceased to exist.

Today, we are engaged in another war – the war on terrorism. We call it the “war on terrorism,” but really, that isn’t right. Terrorism is a tactic, a tool. It is a tool used by those who have aims very similar to the Nazis and the Communists of the Soviet Union and its satellite states. Unfortunately, we have not been as quick to recognize, this time around, the “ism” we are fighting today. But some have begun to recognize this struggle for what it is.

“Since the horror of 9/11, we have learned a great deal about the enemy. We have learned that they are evil and kill without mercy – but not without purpose. We have learned that they form a global network of extremists who are driven by a perverted vision of Islam – a totalitarian ideology that hates freedom, rejects tolerance, and despises all dissent. And we have learned that their goal is to build a radical Islamic empire where women are prisoners in their homes, men are beaten for missing prayer meetings, and terrorists have a safe haven...The war against this enemy is more than a military conflict. It is the decisive ideological struggle of the 21st century, and the calling of our generation.”

President Bush uttered these words on the 5th Anniversary of the attacks of 9/11. This president understands the nature of our struggle. It is a fight against the radical ideology of Islamic fundamentalism, and terrorism is its tool.

Don’t take my word for it though. Read the words of the fundamentalists themselves. A translation of one of Osama Bin Laden’s audio tapes reveals his mind: “Death is better than living on this earth with the unbelievers amongst us...Fear God, try to please Him, and do not consult with anyone regarding the killing of those unbelievers.” Ayman al-Zawahiri, Bin Laden’s right-hand man,

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believes that “the Jihad in Iraq requires several incremental goals: The first stage: Expel the Americans from Iraq. The second stage: Establish an Islamic authority or amirate, then develop it and support it until it achieves the level of a caliphate – over as much territory as you can to spread its power in Iraq ... The third stage: Extend the jihad wave to the secular countries neighboring Iraq.”

President Bush and Bin Laden agree on very little, but they both realize that Iraq is a part of the greater struggle we are all engaged in. Other Bin Laden statements reveal his belief that America will grow weary of this fight and retreat, much as we did in Vietnam, Beirut in 1983 and Somalia. Will we prove them right by leaving Iraq before it is time?

The struggle against radical Islamic fundamentalism is indeed the calling of our generation. To win, we are also taking a broad approach to eliminate the root causes of this extremism, encouraging democratic reforms and economic liberalization throughout the Middle East. Elections have been held in Iraq, and its government is making progress. Our men and women in uniform are helping them along.

Once again, America and the world are challenged by an “ism.” We have indeed answered the call, but we cannot hang up until the work is done.